

CT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

FINAL Minutes of Meeting

December 5, 2011, 9:30am

CT-DOAg large conference room, Hartford, CT

MEMBERS PRESENT: George Hindinger, Joseph Bonelli, Paul Larson, John Guskowski, Lucy Nolan, Robin Chesmer, Terry Jones, Jim Krissel, Ben Freund, and Susan Harrigan.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department – Commissioner Steven K. Reviczky, George Krivda, Jr., Director J. Dippel, Katherine Winslow, and Denise O’Meara; Others – Henry Talmage of CT Farm Bureau, Kip Kolesinskas, Joyce Purcell and Jay Mar of NRCS, and WL

I. **Call to Order:**

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:45 am.

II. **Review of September 12, minutes:**

The minutes of the September 12, 2011 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed and approved (Hindinger/Guskowski – Unanimous).

III. **Business:**

1. **Budget and Legislative Update.** Commissioner Reviczky discussed the bi-annual budget, which is now in its second year. Reviczky stated that previously hard hit line-item operating expenses got restored in the last budget. However, Reviczky indicted that there remains a current shortage in personnel, due to various factors, such as retirement, death, or job transition. Reviczky added that there has been a major delay, with approval from DAS, towards filling the vacant positions, and indicated that it took almost a year to get an administrative assistant for his office.

Governor Malloy’s Special Jobs Session, October 2011. Commissioner Reviczky indicated that Governor Malloy has called for a Farm Restoration Initiative, with the intent to put idle farmland back towards becoming productive farmland. In response to the Governor’s request, Director Dippel, and George Krivda, have created a new Agricultural Restoration Program, which has received 5 million new dollars in bonding, specifically allocated to this new program. Reviczky stated that the mission of the Farm Restoration Program is to reclaim overgrown farmland, and bring the fallow land back into productive agricultural production, renovate farm ponds, develop irrigation efficiency, soil restoration, implement agricultural conservation practices, etc. Dippel stated that he is currently working on the application process, and getting the funds approved by the Bond Commission. Dippel indicated that the Farm Restoration Program is a matched-grant initiative program, in which funding dollars from the State, will be leveraged and matched by the farm owner.

Reviczky added that the Energy Improvement Program, a second Initiative Program relating to solar energy and energy improvement, did not make it thru the Legislative Session.

2. **FLP Program summary update and related matters.** Director Dippel discussed the status summary, relating to completed and pending farms. He indicated the Agency has protected 15 farms, from the beginning of this year to date, to include 2-3 pending farms, which should close by the end of this year, for a total of approximately 2,200 acres. Dippel indicated that eight farms have been surveyed, two farms reports are pending approval from the Standards Property Review Board, two offers have been extended, and 12 farms are currently being appraised, with offers expected to be extended.
3. **State Owned Farmlands (a/k/a Southbury Training School).** Director Dippel indicated that he and George Krivda met with a group from Office and Policy Management, at Southbury Training School, to give a tour of the farm, and to promote preserving farmland. The turnout was good, and received a receptive response, from OPM. Krivda stated that there is doubt as to the State's ability to permanently preserve land, due to different agencies involved, having different interests, and changing administrations, with a different philosophy about how to handle state-owned land, and preserving farmland. Reviczky commented that positive changes have occurred, due to a change of senior staff at **DMH**, with agencies not butting heads, and added that **DEEP** is the agency that is the largest holder of state-owned land, that has the greatest percentage of prime land, most suitable for farming. Krivda and stated that **STS** is the crown jewel example, to spring-board towards positively dealing with preserving additional state-owned lands as farmland. Reviczky stated that a critical component to be added to the deed transaction, in order for the preservation of farmland to be held in perpetuity, is to have a third party on the deed.

IV. Subcommittee Reports:

1. **Stewardship and Policy Subcommittee Report.** Robin Chesmer indicated that the subcommittee is to schedule a meeting for January, 2012. Director Dippel presented a power point relating to preserved farms, and stewardship. Dippel discussed how agricultural structures, energy saving structures, as well as ponds, swales, driveways, utilities, are all factors that must be considered, when determining the site location of the application to build, and the total impact of prime farming soils and impervious surfaces. Dippel indicated each farm negotiation is unique, with conveyance deed restrictions, which are unique to each farm. Dippel stated that more recent conveyance deeds tend to have defined farmstead envelope areas, with allowable impacts to prime farming soils and impervious surfaces, generally limited to 1-2%.
2. **Community Farms Program Criteria Subcommittee Report.** Guskowski discussed the new \$2million pilot program that has been established and expressed gratitude to Director Dippel and Agent Winslow for their help and input, towards making the Small Community Farms Program a reality. Guskowski stated that the Municipalities are required to be strong partners with the State, to be able to participate in the Program. Guskowski discussed the framework and criteria of the Program, as being a two-step process. Guskowski indicated that the first step of the process, is for the Municipality to take the lead, and create a Town Agricultural Commission. Guskowski added that the Second Step of the process, is for the Municipality to have outreach and education to the local farmers, and allow the farmers to submit an application, by June 2012.

3. **Uses of Preserved Farmlands Subcommittee Report.** Hindinger discussed the meeting he attended relating to Nursery Groups, and agricultural practices. Hindinger indicated that Kevin Sullivan is the point person for the Nursery Groups, who want to use scientific methods, to find solutions for the loss of soils, while using ball & burlap agricultural practices. Hindinger added that neither Kevin Sullivan, nor the Nursery Group has gone to the Commissioner, or NRCS, regarding these issues. Hindinger indicated, that he stated at the meeting, that he hoped for open communication, and it would be a good idea for the Nursery Group to contact the Commissioner of Agriculture and NRCS. Chesmer commented that our Program is all about preserving and protecting the farming soils. Chesmer added, that there will always be Special Interest Groups, and seeking to by-pass our criteria, is a grave concern, which must be addressed. Hindinger motion to draft a letter from the Farmland Advisory Board, to Bob Heffernan, Director of Nursery Groups. (motion approved-unanimous).

VI. Adjournment:

Dippel asked if the Board would like to have the next meeting at a farm, which met with approval. Hindinger asked for input of potential farm-meeting locations, and indicated he would select one of the farm locations submitted, for the next meeting.

Next meeting, Monday, March 5th, 2012, 9:30am, at Farm location to be determined. The meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

(Jones/Guszkowski – Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Denise O'Meara

Date: December 9, 2011